



# THE FLYER

Volume 17, No. 7

July/August 1993

Williamsburg Bird Club

## Meeting

None in August. We'll resume normal "third Wednesday" schedule on September 15th. Former member Brian Patteson will introduce us to the exciting world of pelagic birds.

## Field Trips

None scheduled for August

## Coming Attractions

**September 18th**—Waller Mill Pond. Close by— look, listen and walk to observe fall migrants.  
(Amanda Allen—leader)

**October 23rd**—Bay Bridge Tunnel Islands, and on to Kiptopeke to catch the fall migration of raptors.  
(Brian Taber—leader)

**November 20th**—Ruth Beck's 26 acres in Barhamsville, which include a large fresh water pond and mixed bottomland hardwood habitat.  
(Ruth, of course)

**December 19th**—Christmas Bird Count

## Welcome to New Members

Thomas & Elva Mikula (220-8412)  
2264 Lake Powell Road  
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

Steven & Shirley Devan (565-2352)  
106 Winter East  
Williamsburg, Va. 23188

## President's Column

The summer is flying by so fast. It is hard to believe it is August already. I hope you all have had a good vacation and are looking forward to cooler weather. It has been a busy summer for me. Field work with the nesting colonial species was successful. The colonial bird surveys were very successful this breeding season. We saw many young skimmers this year, a sight I have not seen for 8 years. A general summary of the beach nesting birds on this side of the bay in areas you are familiar with follows.

**Grandview Beach, Hampton**—350 pairs of Least Terns. Production good.

**Hampton Roads Tunnel, South Island**—3200 pairs of Common Terns—200 pairs of Skimmers

**Craney island, Portsmouth, Va.**—200 pairs of Least Terns—4 pairs of Piping Plover nesting successfully.

I look forward to seeing you all this fall.

*Ruth Beck*



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## **Early Local Bird Movements**

Now that the breeding season is nearly over, we can expect to experience the local movements of birds which have nested somewhere in our local area. This especially true of warbler species, so don't be too startled when you see Redstarts, Black and White Warblers; Prairie Warblers, Pine Warblers, Prothonotary Warblers, Yellow-throated Warblers, Louisiana Waterthrushes, and a vireo or two. They tend to move about locally in post-breeding and foraging activities before grouping up for the big trip south. They won't be very vocal, and some of them will have plumage changes from the way you remember them. So it may be a good strategy to check your field guide for fall plumages (particularly for warblers), and to check your **Summary of Local Bird Data** for dates.

Then too, the major fall migration patterns will be upon us even before you receive your September FLYER—so it's really not too early for an annual fall refresher course.

## **Birds in Hot Weather**

Birds suffer from heat just as plain folks do, even though their body temperatures range from 103 to 109. Unlike us, birds have no sweat glands, so all excess body heat must be dissipated through the respiratory system. Terres, in *Encyclopedia of North American Birds* tells us that passerine birds begin to pant with bills agape when temperatures around them reach 105-107, and that they are in great jeopardy if their surrounding temperatures reach 113 degrees. He adds that *. . .when all means of evaporative cooling are insufficient to lower body temperatures. . . birds become less active and find shaded places where they pant and rest.* Maybe we can help a bit with some fresh water in a shallow container (in the shade) or a very fine spray from a hose or sprinkler.

## **On The Road Again**

On 6/01, Julie and Ty Hotchkiss set out in their RV in the general direction of the Tetons. In a letter of 6/16 from Oklahoma, Julie reports many warblers the first few days out—Blackburnians, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue (and Green), Mourning Warblers, and Winter Wrens. Through Illinois, they saw large numbers of Red-headed Woodpeckers and Dickcissel—plus a single male Greater Prairie Chicken who posed for Ty. Kansas brought them Loggerhead Shrikes and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers.

Dateline 7/5/93 Grand Teton National Park

This is Julie's very favorite park. As for birds, she makes particular mention of Rufous Hummingbirds zipping about their feeder; of Snipe whinnying; of Yellow Warblers singing in the willows; and of a Black-headed Grosbeak signing.

Dateline 7/19/93 Atlantic City, Wyoming

Julie and Ty helped celebrate an Oregon Trail celebration at South City Pass, Wyoming, on the 22nd. They joined a wagon train to recreate the westward passage of 150 years ago, and Julie chose to ride a horse rather than bounce along in a wagon!

*Birds are taking second place to the trail at the moment. However have seen Golden Eagles, Swainson's Hawks, Ferruginous Hawks, and hummers. . . including the Calliope, Broad-tailed and flashy Rufous. •*

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## **Local Scene**

Tom Armour reports a singing Kentucky Warbler in his KM yard on 1 June. On the 16th, there were four Prothonotary Warbler eggs in Tom's nesting box. This is the same box which housed 4 feathered young as late as May 24th! No way of knowing, but Tom presumes the same parents simply extended their lease.

Grace Doyle reports Black-crowned Night Herons making weird nocturnal noises at Kingsmill Pond in mid-June. Grace also commented that she has seen/heard more Wood Thrushes than in previous years, and reports Towhees with fledged young for the first time in her neighborhood. Tom Armour also had young Towhees for the first time. Are they coming in from former wooded areas being devoted to golf courses and condominiums, or are the Kingsmill shrubbery beds maturing to their liking—or both? On June 12, the Doyles saw 2 Great Egret, a Green-backed Heron and 2 Yellow-billed Cuckoos along the Country Road.

On June 18th, Bill Williams watched a Sharp-shinned Hawk being harassed by Purple Martins. Unusual to see Sharpies here in the June/July period, and our Club records show only 2 in each of these months. During June and July, my yard on Oak Road has been full of young birds: Towhees, Chickadees, Carolina Wrens, Thrushes, Jays, Bluebirds, Catbirds, House Finches, Grackles, Great-Crested Flycatchers, White-breasted Nuthatches, Flickers, Downy Woodpeckers, Hairys, and Red-billed Woodpeckers—and, of course, Cardinals. I have "cheated" just a bit. I distribute

about a large handful each of peanut chips and black sunflower seeds each morning—some on the ground, and some in each of several small feeders. I also make an effort to keep water in 3 or 4 small birdbaths—and usually run a fine spray hose sprinkler at about 5 p./m. (Cocktail hour, you know. Hate to drink alone) What I have **not** had are Red-eyed Vireos, Tanagers or Wood Peewees.

Bill Snyder has, on several occasions, watched Turkey Vultures settle down into the wooded area just off the Jamestown Island entry road just after you cross the isthmus. Bill believes they may be nesting there, but chiggers and ticks have prevented his checking it out. Some years ago, too many to count, Bill did find a nest in that area. He also found that the adult Vulture's defense is a foul one indeed. It is regurgitation, and Bill would much prefer meeting a skunk head-on. On June 20th, the Doyles checked out Camp Peary and found Red-headed Woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatches, Yellow-throated Warblers, Acadian Flycatchers and a Prairie Warbler in song.

On June 25, Bill watched a majestic mature Bald Eagle sitting atop the big cypress tree in the James off of Jamestown Island. Many of us have shared this experience with both Eagles and Great Blue Herons sharing the limelight. Sadly, this landmark cypress was blown down during a severe wind on the night of July 10th. The Virginia Gazette carried the story on 7/13, in which park officials aged the tree as 150 or more years.

On June 26, Mr. & Mrs. Mount, at Williamsburg Landing, reported an adult male Dickcissel at a feeder several times that day. Other observers at the Landing

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were alerted, but the bird was not seen again. This is a rare bird for us, with only 4 previous recorded sightings. The bird looks like a small meadowlark, and likes weedy, overgrown fields. Stay alert! On July 2, Tom Armour watched 6 tiny Wood Duck paddling around on Kingsmill Pond. Tom believes these were day-old birds. Like many other ducks, geese and shore birds, they are born ready to go: eyes open, covered with down, and mobile. However, it does take a couple weeks or more for them to fly. On July 6, Tom reported a Pied-billed Grebe on Kingsmill Pond. This is an unusual sighting for July, for even though they have been known to breed in our area, we have no recent breeding records. In fact the only other July sightings of which we are aware are on Powhatan Creek in 1980 (Snyder) and in 1982 at Cheatham Annex (Sheehan).

July 12 and 13, I watched a single Gnatcatcher flitting about my yard. A Great Egret was observed on Kingsmill Pond on the 13th. On July 18th, Joe Doyle, who is our Bluebird Chairman, was stopped at the Camp Peary gate and asked by the guard to take a look at a Bluebird nest. There were young birds in it., and it was located in a soft-drink machine! The machine, in service until the nest was discovered a few weeks prior, was one of the elderly ones that had a compartment in which to drop the aluminum tabs when the cans were popped. Thoughtfully, the Peary staff had put a sign on the machine to the effect that it was out of order because of nesting bluebirds. There is an empty nesting box within fifty feet. Mr Doyle,

wise in the way of bluebirds, believes the bluebird tried to buy a soft drink but that (in this hot weather) the machine neither responded nor returned the bird's money. Obviously, a bluebird can't kick or shake the machine—so he just settled in to raise a family and wait it out. (The editor hallucinates readily in the heat of summer.) That very day, the Doyles continued into Camp Peary, and at the site of a recently drained pond, found 34 Great Blue Herons, 6 Great Egrets, 2 Snowy Egrets and 5 Green-backed Herons. A Yellow Warbler and a Red-shouldered Hawk were also present. Joe noted that Ospreys were engaged in nest-building on Channel Marker #18, and that this would appear to be a rather late date for new construction. Hope you'll monitor this from time to time, Joe.

Not quite local, but Tom Armour saw a Loggerhead Shrike on a wire in the vicinity of Leesburg. Last Shrike reported here was by Bill Williams at Hog island—in late August of 1989. Steve and Shaune Reams, in Queen's Lake, are seeing up to eight Yellow-crowned Night Herons almost daily. They also seem to have cornered the Hummingbird market. The Reams maintain five separate feeders, and have recorded as many as **35** in sight at one time! So if you're missing a hummer, call Dr. Steve. (Steve has been kind enough to share with us both their formula and their method of cleaning feeders. Look among the items on page 6 herein.

On 7/23, members of the Richmond Audubon Society reported "many shorebirds, including 5-6 White Ibis at Hog Island in the first impoundment on the right-hand side of the road. On 7/25, with his trusty scope, Tom Armour confirmed the above. We counted eleven White Ibis, 2 Semipalmated Plovers, 30 each of the Yellowlegs, 1 Pectoral Sandpiper



and 25 Short-billed Dowitchers. Because of distance and light, it was impossible to sort out the small sandpipers which scurried about on the mudflats. On the wires, swallows were perched—half a dozen Martins, 12 Rough-winged, 20 Bank and over 100 Tree Swallows. Looked hard for Cliff Swallows, but no luck. Steve Reams thought he saw a few immatures at Queens Lake on 7/25, but wasn't certain. Nearest place where we have breeding records is under the Benjamin Harrison Bridge west of us over the James.

On 7/26, an adult male Hooded Warbler inspected some small shrubbery, a large vive and bird bath on my deck for about 6 minutes. Same day, Tom reported 30 Royal Terns at the KM Marina.

On 7/27 Hog Island produced the following standouts among 52 species observed: Great Egret-45, Snowy Egret-20, White Ibis-9, Greater Yellowlegs-12, Lesser Yellowlegs-20, Marbled Godwit-1, Stilt Sandpiper-2, Least Tern-2, Short-billed Dowitcher-35, Bald Eagles-2.

Tom McCary, here visiting his parents, reports Louisiana Waterthrushes in College Woods, and Blue-headed Grosbeaks on the access road to York River State Park. Tom also told of seeing 2 Worm-eating Warblers recently in the upper Shenandoah Valley.

On 7/28, Hog Island presented about the same menu as on the 27th, with these exceptions: White Ibis count increased to 22, mostly immature; and four Bald Eagles, a single Yellow Warbler, and about 40 Gnatcatchers made the scene.

### **Annual WBC Grant for Research Project**

President Ruth Beck has announced that Kristine Clements has been selected as recipient of the Club's annual research grant. Kristine's study subject is Great Blue Heron populations along the James and Chickahominy Rivers.

The club extends its collective congratulations to Ms. Clements, and we look forward to her presentation on the results of her research at a club meeting in the Spring of 1994.

### **July WBC Birdwalk**

Tom Armour reports the following highlights from his trip to Craney Island, Portsmouth, on 7/24: Great Egret-25, Snowy Egret-10, Tri-colored Heron-4, Northern Harrier-2, Red-tailed Hawk-1, Black-necked Stilt-3, Avocet-6, Willet-2, Semi-palmated Sandpiper-50, Western Sandpiper-?, White-rumped Sandpiper-1, Short-billed Dowitcher-6, Royal Tern-25, Common Tern-2, Least Tern-10.

Also observed were groups of birders from Richmond Audubon and the Cape Charles clubs.



# It Should Be Noted

It is noted with pleasure that former club member **Sue Ridd** has been elected president of the prestigious Richmond Audubon Society. Sue did graduate work with a year's study of the birds at York River State Park. Her final report was and is the cornerstone of our local data for birds at YRSP.

It is also noted with pleasure member **Brian Patteson** has been named a regional editor of the publication *American Birds*. Brian will be the speaker at our September meeting.

**House Finches**—Several members have commented on the increasing number of House Finches and an apparent concurrent decline in House Sparrows. This is very true in my yard. I have no rationale for the situation, although I sometimes speak harshly to House Sparrows—when occurring.

**Honey Bees**—Absence of honey bees in the area has aroused some attention locally—even in the *Virginia Gazette's* **Last Word** column. Dick Mahone, who is close to the agricultural community, attributes it to a mite which does internal damage to the bee.

**New Books for Williamsburg Regional Library**—Alice Springe reports that our Club has donated the following books in the library in recent weeks:

*Encyclopedia of Birds*, Editors: Drs. Perrins & Middleton  
*Impeccable Bird Feeding* (Paperback) by: Bill Adler, Jr.

[Ed. Note: The latter is a whimsical treatment of problems associated with feeding native birds. Good coverage of feeding habits of each species, with emphasis on “messiness factors” and what to do about it. A good light read.]

**Non Hummers**—If the level of your hummingbird “nectar” seems to go down beyond the normal capabilities of the hummers, watch for a larger bird and its efforts to have a sip. Just alighting on a hanging feeder will cause spillage, as will the bird's sudden departure. Culprits reported this year include Chickadees, Catbirds, Titmice, Downy Woodpeckers and House Finches.

**Care and Feeding of Hummers—à la Reams:** Bring 4 quarts of water to a boil and then stir in five cups of sugar and 2 or 3 drops of red food coloring. Bring mix back just to point of boil, remove from heat and let stand til cool. (They do theirs in evening and let stand overnight) They boil the mix to eliminate any possible harmful bacteria. Food color is used not so much as an attractant, but so Steve and Shaune can readily observe liquid levels.

To clean their feeders, they wash with warm water—without soap. If any fungal growth is present add a couple teaspoons of chlorox and let stand for about a half hour. Residual traces of chlorox after rinsing are not harmful.



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## Members in Costa Rica

President Ruth Beck, Mr. Michael Beck, and former president (and founder) Bill Williams, are spending a month or so in Costa Rica. Ruth is doing some lecturing and instructional work; Michael is serving as interpreter; Bill is continuing his research into the international habits of his favorite bird—House Sparrow (*passer domesticus*). Readers may remember that Bill started this project in Mexico earlier in the year. Allegedly, he is trying to prove that there is a Spanish-chirping sub-species of the bird, to be named ***passer domesticus williamsii***, no doubt.

### Debugging Your Hummingbird Feeder

The following solution to a problem was sent in to *Bird Watcher's Digest* by Hellen Ochs of Columbus, Indiana.

Last summer a reader of my column and I worked together on an experiment to keep bees, wasps, and yellowjackets away from the hummingbird feeder. It worked!

Put the regular hummingbird solution in a small container—an old saucer or jar lid.

We placed the jar lid on the ground quite close to the feeder until the undesirable insects found it and started feeding from it. We moved the the lid a little further distance away from the hummingbird feeder each day. The insects followed, seeming to prefer feeding on the ground.

Once this reliable source of nectar was established, we had few, if any, insects at the hummingbird feeder. And the hummers never went to the insect feeder.

I suggest the insect feeder be placed on a stone or brick to prevent anyone accidentally stepping on it and getting stung.

**Member Martha Armstrong**, whose expertise includes both birds and plants, shares with us a recent visit from a granddaughter:

“A seven year old, who has developed a great thirst for knowledge, arrived for a visit of “three weeks”. In three days she was ready to go home; however there were enough birds and books, guppies and snails to keep her occupied for just over a week.

We learned from reading *When Birds Change Their Feathers* by Roma Gans that Goldfinches lose their feathers twice a year but that penguins drop theirs all at one! *Mockingbird Trio* by Arline Thomas was not only a fun story but also the writer presented a vivid description of Audubon's painting of Mockers. We looked in our copy of *Audubon's Birds of America* and she was able to see the Jasmine bush, the snake, nest, the eggs and the fight between birds and snake.

Treasures were packed carefully in a box for the ride home—among them, an unidentified bird nest, containing five white marbles that had been in the bottom of the guppy bowl. Left behind were four bottles of sugar water for the hummingbirds. . . . one blue, one green, one yellow and one red!”

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## **Far and Away**

In the June issue, we reported that the Blairs had reached Lincoln, Nebraska, in late May in their quest to follow the Oregon Trail to the West Coast. Thom has kept us posted about subsequent highlights, edited as below:

Dateline 6/14/93, Green River, Wyoming

*On the Sagebrush Red Desert, north of here, amongst wild horses, saw Sage Thrashers, Sage Sparrow, Vesper Sparrows, McCown's Longspur, Swainson's Hawks, Horned Larks and Lark Sparrows—among others. Near Green River, at a National Wildlife Refuge. . . . saw Cinnamon Teal for the first time; also MacGillivray's Warbler—sounds Irish, but looked more like Connecticut Warbler. Last night it was down to 36 degrees—and we drove through 3 hours of snow!*

Dateline 6/10/93, Oregon Coast

*We made it! We're camped within a mile of the Pacific Ocean, about 2 miles from a rock called THE HAYSTACK—inhabited by colonies of Tufted Puffins, Pigeon Gullimots, and Pelagic Cormorants.*

*Had a great afternoon near LaGrande, Oregon in the Blue Mountains (not Blue Ridge)—3 miles from anywhere in the woodpecker capital of Oregon. Saw not only Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, but also Williamson's Sapsuckers. Also Red-shafted Flickers, Hairy, and a new one for me—Black-backed Woodpecker. Also saw my first Gray Jays and Clark's Nutcrackers—plus old friends such as Kestrels, Robins, Juncos and Chipping Sparrows. . . . After a week here, we'll hit the trail east—trying to follow the same rivers followed by Lewis and Clark. . . .*

Dateline 7/3/93, Rapid City, South Dakota

*Here for the weekend of the 4th. Enroute, we stopped in Sundance—famous for the "Sundance Kid". Asked Rochet who he was—she said Paul Newman. Actually he was a local horse thief—but he stole a slow horse and they caught him. C'est la vie!*

Dateline 7/24/93 Stanardsville, Va.

*We got back home on 7/15 and have been busy ever since. . . .last real birding was as we passed through Yellowstone. . . .in the midst of an immense green valley, with snow-covered mountains as a backdrop, was a piece of water called Swan Lake—and there on one side was a Trumpeter Swan feeding in the shallows. What a sight! All we needed was some Tschaikovsky's ballet music in the background.*

Thom goes on to describe the many daily storms they experienced through N. Dakota, Iowa and Missouri. Commenting on the recent (and continuing) floods in central U.S. Thom says:

*It seems to me that too many levees plus putting all the flood plains in cultivation and building developments is a formula for disastrous floods forever. I'm afraid we have messed around with old Mother Nature just a little too much. I feel sure the world will survive—not so sure about our own species.*

For all the wonders of their trip, Thom concludes: *It was good to get back where you know what you were hearing in the woods: good old Blue Jays, Carolina Wrens, Cardinals and Indigo Buntings—with a Bobwhite or Wood Thrush in the back ground is very pleasant.*

Your friendly editor welcomes any news items, short articles for publication, comments on birds (or editors) etc. Thanks.

Bill Sheehan (220-2122)  
104 Oak Road  
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

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